

## House Republican Press Release

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### Ethics Issues Take Center Stage



*By State Representative John J. Ryan*

Probably the biggest news story from the State Capitol this week will be Governor M. Jodi Rell's first Budget Address, occurring this Wednesday. This will kick off the budget process for this year and that issue (given our looming \$1 billion-plus deficit) will dominate this year's business. But since we are 'going to press' before the Governor's proposal is unveiled, let's quickly look at last week's big news item, namely that for the first time in many years, a governor appeared before a legislative committee in person to testify on behalf of legislation, in this case, Governor Rell's package of proposed legislation on ethics and campaign finance reform.

As we all know too well, this topic has been a highly visible theme of recent news, and Gov. Rell, after much thought and analysis, has assembled a presented a sweeping series of reforms, some of which briefly can be summarized as follows:

- A ban on 'ad books' that fundraising tool where ads are sold to lobbyists, contractors, special interest groups and others, for political fundraisers;
- A new schedule for limiting contributions by Party Committees to various races; Further limits to contributions by both Organization PACs (political action committees) and Business PACs;
- A prohibition on business entities forming more than one PAC; A ban on lobbyist contributions (or lobbyist PAC contributions) for State races;
- A ban on contributions to State races by businesses contracting with the State;
- A limit of one PAC to each General Assembly caucus;
- A ban on PAC establishment by members of the General Assembly;
- Extensive provisions to update and strengthen the State Ethics Commission.

These comprehensive proposals have attracted considerable media attention, and most of the political 'powers-that-be' seem to be in agreement this year that SOMETHING in the way of substantial reform has to be achieved this year! Please keep in mind, however, that the Governor's proposed package of reforms does NOT include a controversial proposal espoused largely by liberal Democrat groups of "publicly funded elections."

This system, where your tax dollars would be used to fund campaigns, is being touted a "clean elections proposal" would radically change the way elections are conducted, and

has not been demonstrated to achieve any of its lofty goals of increasing candidate participation, reducing the influence of special interest groups or curbing campaign costs. But given that catchy labels (who could be against a concept like "clean elections" ?) and marketing techniques are an all-important aspect of government business these days, you can be assured that you will be hearing more slogans and more news on this topic in the future.

In fact, proponents of these proposals generally prefer to use the term "public financing." The preference for this phrase results from the fact that when it becomes known tax dollars would somehow be used for campaign ads and many of the other campaign-related items that voters are deluged with every election season (quite possibly for candidates they do not personally favor), support drops dramatically.

And while I am all for any reasonable reforms to the system, since we must insure that integrity and voter confidence in our system of government are as high as possible, I am not under the naive impression that any proposals, no matter how extensive or well-intentioned, will make the system perfect. In my view, the best way to keep government humming efficiently and honestly is to keep as many of the 'customers,' namely the voters, as informed and involved as we possibly can.

More news soon, and watch for the stories in today's dailies on the Governor's budget proposals!

Please feel free to contact me with your concerns and issues. As your state representative, it is my job, and my priority to represent you and to make sure that your needs and concerns are addressed at the capitol. You can write to me at Room 4200, Legislative Office Building, Hartford, CT 06106-1591, send me e-mail at [John.Ryan@housegop.state.ct.us](mailto:John.Ryan@housegop.state.ct.us) or call my office toll-free at 1-800-842-1423.